

An Unimpressive Juxtaposition

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Summary:

Henry Bowers wants to talk to Beverly Marsh about her father, but she doesn't want his company or this conversation.

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Author's Note:

"Pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having that turned [...] into a new means of violence and suffering."

~~Oliver Twist.

Cigarettes and black coffee mix into an acrid smell. Bev already knew that, and was cautious to not let the dregs of her own black coffee that she was using as an ashtray tip over and fall into the pavement. It would stink up the entire side of the apartment building, as last night's rain was still drying and so one could smell everything better.

It was April. The last of the snow had already melted and Easter decorations were in the windows of houses with children. It was warm enough for Beverly to sit on the fire escape with the hems of her jeans rolled up and her sneakers slipped on without socks, as she was doing now.

And she needed to be out here with a few cigarettes more than ever. A friend of hers, an older girl named Sandy Spungen, hadn't been around lately. The public junior and senior high schools of Derry, Maine shared a building and a parking lot. It wasn't uncommon to see seventh grade kids brushing past high school seniors with their own cars when the final bell rung. So, while the high school students still had a bit of a stigma around being friends with kids too little to refer to their education level with anything but numbers, it happened more often than it would in other towns. Sandy Spungen was a sophomore who didn't care what anyone else thought, and was happy to befriend the eighth grade Bev Marsh. She called her Cleverly Beverly, and lent her books, and biked with her so she didn't have to go home alone.

It was nice to have a friend who could help her understand what was going on around her. Sandy was still growing up herself -- she had no illusions about that -- but she had already lived through a

considerable amount of puberty. She knew how it felt when you were about to grow in your chest, how to match makeup to your natural coloring, what to expect from a period, and she was even learning how to drive. But more than all of that, she knew that teenage emotions were delicate and plentiful, like a swarm of butterflies. She was a shoulder to cry on and a voice to tell Beverly *"Fuck them and their wrong opinions."*

The one thing Sandy couldn't help her with were boys. Everyone heard the name, chuckled, and said some variation on *"Spungen, huh? Does she like boys who look like Sid Vicious?"* She didn't. The truth was that she liked *girls* who looked like Sid Vicious. She had one hell of a crush on a particular one, and told Bev about her whenever she brushed or braided her hair.

Sandy hadn't been coming to school lately. It wouldn't be quite so gut-wrenching or worrisome if she had known for sure that her friend had gotten out of Derry altogether. Being kicked out of your own home for something inconsequential that you couldn't help was terrible and Bev would never wish it on anyone. That being said, if anyone could handle it, she was sure it'd be Sandy goddamn Spungen. She wore steel-toed Doc Martin boots and short skirts. The most hardened trucker or biker didn't scare her in the least and she could hustle pool like nobody's business. If any of them ever did give her trouble, she kept a sharpened boy scout pocket knife in her belt, though Bev pictured her putting her cigarette out in the man's eye. She could do all manner of lawnwork and housework and even a few simple auto repairs if she really needed the cash. She was sweet and gentle, but that didn't mean she wasn't also tough as nails.

But she couldn't be sure if she ever did get out. Children and teens were going missing left and right lately, and a few turned up as horribly mutilated bodies. She didn't want Sandy to die, much less at the hands of whatever sicko was doing all of this.

She heard the light smack of sneaker soles on the parking lot and side walk. She didn't look up, she just held her cigarette lower. Her father wore heavy work boots that pounded the pavement, so it couldn't be him, but people were nosy and could tattle on her. Her father made it clear what would happen to her if she was caught smoking. He would make her eat cigarettes and do push-ups until

she threw up, then she would have to clean it up herself. As bad as that would be, the worst would be his hands afterward. They reached where a father's hands shouldn't and stayed there. They would tighten their grip and he would press heavy kisses into the top of her head. *"I worry about you, Bevvie,"* he'd whisper in her ear, or some variation on it. *"Sometimes, I worry a lot."*

How many times had she wanted to tell him to stop? She did everything she could to keep from catching his attention. Sometimes, he'd slip into her room in the dead of the night. Maybe he thought she was sleeping. She'd want to scream, to cry out, but all she could bring herself to do was clench her teeth and fists and let the tears spill out.

The slapping of the sneakers continued up the stairs. She figured it was one of the younger boys who lived nearby that she would babysit on Fridays and Saturdays, coming over to ask if she had anything to trade. She always had Doublemint gum and root beer barrel hard candies and strike-anywhere matches. They would especially hound her for matches because firecrackers were fun, but only if you could light them. That, and there was always a pyromaniac who wanted to burn things like paper or twigs and watch as they crumble.

But when she heard the voice of the one the sneakers belonged to giving her a "Hey, Beverly," she knew it couldn't be one of the boys she babysat. He was an older boy than that. Older than her. She looked up.

It was that sadistic son of a bitch, Henry Bowers.

If he hadn't caught her by surprise, she would have already been inside, but he did and he had a death grip on her forearm the second she got the window open. It felt like a bear trap. She tried to wriggle free, half-expecting him to pull her inches away from him and turn her around. But he didn't. He just stood there, his hand clamped on her arm like a carnivore's jaws.

"I wanna talk," he said. He wasn't angry, he was frank.

She couldn't remember when the cigarette slipped from between her fingers. She wished she still had it between her teeth. She could

have pressed the crumbling tip in his hand. She pushed and pulled at his fingers and he let her go, pushing the window closed in the same breath. He stepped in front of it, leaning against it and facing her.

"I just wanna talk."

She supposed she could bolt down the stairs, but he would catch her. And so what if he didn't? The door to her apartment was locked and she left her key on the kitchen table. Best to just keep it here, where he was staying quiet, and not make a scene. So she sat down in her chair and turned toward him. She sucked in breath between her teeth, a sort of reverse hiss, ran a thumb over the back of her front teeth and struck a match there to light the fresh cigarette in her other hand. Later that year, she would teach Richie Trashmouth Tozier this trick, and years after that, when they had forgotten each others' names, he would use the trick to pick up chicks at parties.

With a newly lit cigarette in her mouth, she looked Bowers in the eye and took a nice, long drag. She plucked it out with all the snippy grace of a proper punk or flapper, and blew the smoke directly into his face with the most aloof-yet-fuck-you-with-a-jackhammer look she could muster in her eyes.

"Then start talking."

He licked his lips almost nervously, as if it could remind him how to speak, and returned her gaze.

"I can make your dad stop," he said. "You must be sick of him touching you."

Her cool, collected, don't-give-a-shit façade almost cracked in half and fell, but she was able to tone it down to a distrustful confusion and suspicion. *How could he know?*

And then she remembered. Some time ago, she'd rushed out of the school bathroom, face still red and wet from crying and a bit of sudsy water running down her leg from under her skirt. She thought no one cared to notice, but if she really considered it, she guessed that might have been the origin of the slut rumors about her. She shared her social studies class with Henry (freshman level world history, she

was bumped up to it and he had to retake it) but never took him for the type to notice if a girl suddenly started flinching away from people touching her. Perhaps that was an unfair assumption.

"I bet you gave up trying to scrub his fingers off," he said, indicating that he was recalling the same situation. "They never seem to go away, no matter how much you scrub. It makes you feel sick, filthy, worthless, like garbage."

He wasn't taunting with these words, he simply stated them as facts. If he had a shred of kindness or basic human decency, it all might have rung with sympathy.

"And what the *fuck* is that to you?" she spat out, as if her words were the reason her stomach was churning and that bitter taste appeared in the back of her mouth. She wondered if she had even tried to sound detached that time and noticed a spark of fear flash in his eyes for half of a second.

"I told you," he replied. "I can make him stop."

"Yeah? How?" she demanded, still spitting venom and fire.

"You know Patrick Hockstetter?"

"The one who killed his baby brother?"

"He owes me a favor," Henry said, not even bothering with a can-neither-confirm-nor-deny gesture or disclaimer.

The Hockstetter boy was nigh impossible to defend. Though the investigation of baby Avery Hockstetter's untimely fate claimed the death accidental, there was more doubt than even a town as secretive as Derry was comfortable with. Patrick's boot prints showed he walked to the baby's crib, but was he looking at a baby laying face down on a pillow too big for him, or did he push the baby's face down into it? How much had Mrs. Hockstetter had to drink that day? Why did Patrick show no signs of distress? Why did they take so long to check on the baby? Why did Mr. Hockstetter avoid questions about his older son?

Of course, anyone who went to school with Patrick wouldn't rule out

the possibility that baby Avery's death was entirely his fault. He was an unpleasant boy to be around. Something about him oozed unsavory intentions. A few unlucky girls not only witnessed this but experienced it firsthand. He liked to sit behind them and touch, going so far as to stick his hands under shirts and unclasp bras while the teachers weren't looking. He sat next to some poor girl at the movies once. She said he put his arm around her shoulder, like they were dating, and when she tried to leave, he hooked his arm around her neck in a stranglehold. He groped her, pinched her, made her drink from his spiked soda, and stuck a hand under her skirt. He didn't grab at her, but he left a maggoty dead shrew in her lap. She tried to get it off of her, but he held her arms and the more she kicked, the closer it got to her crotch. And that wasn't even to mention all the rumors. Supposedly, he got his kicks killing small animals as slowly and painfully as possible and bought a tape cassette of children crying and begging someone to stop from a shady guy in an alleyway. When Beverly asked Sandy why he had it, she said that she heard that he jerked off to it every night.

What in the everloving fuck was Henry doing with him? Henry Bowers was a nasty little prick and a shitstain on the town of Derry in his own right, no one would deny that, but surely he couldn't be that far gone. There was talk about them, of course, of what went on when no one else was around. The other kids suggested there was inappropriate touching and drugs involved, but how much of either and the severity of it depended on who told you. Anyone who considered asking Henry about it knew that they would likely be punched in the mouth until they lost all of their teeth. As for Patrick, no one in their right mind would touch Patrick Hockstetter with a ten foot pole.

"He doesn't hafta kill him if you don't want," Henry said. "Just put him in the hospital for a while. Or cripple him. It's a lot harder to fondle girls from a wheelchair. Impossible if you're paralyzed from the neck down." He cocked his head casually, as if he was only offering her eggs or apples from his dad's farm. "What do you say?"

She eyed him cautiously and took another good drag as she processed her thoughts. "You're not known for your generosity, Bowers," she said, her tone dripping with cynicism. "What's your price?"

He shifted his weight away from the window and closer to her. He began to stroke her hair. She instinctively flinched away.

"You're really pretty, Beverly. I think a guy'd do just about anything to have you to himself: sitting in his lap, hanging out with him, kissing him, letting him walk you home, or do whatever he wants." He had continued stroking her hair and was stretching his fingers to her cheek when she swatted them away.

"You want me to be your gun moll?" she asked. *Gun moll* because that's what Sandy would have said, and *girlfriend* didn't sound quite right. She was going for unimpressed if a bit amused. She thought she nailed it.

Henry seemed to have a thing for Sandy, or so Bev thought. It was more than understandable, Sandy was quite pretty, but Henry would stare at them intently whenever he saw them hanging out. The truth was he would be happy with either one, but he figured he could only wear them down into saying yes if they were alone. As much as he liked Sandy, she was the tougher of the two. Whenever he walked up to them, it was Sandy who said, *"Barking up the wrong tree there, Bowers. Get lost."*

But there was something about those stares that unnerved Beverly. She had begun to become aware of sex and romance and how they could be perverted, so to speak, into weaponized mockeries of themselves. She already dealt with some rather fucked up dynamics at home, she didn't want to be pushed into anything else. Henry Bowers was the type to push things to the edge of their limits, then give a final shove. She was worried he might try that on her. Sandy told her that if he did, she should tell him to stop and if he didn't stop, *that bitch who keeps trying to call you a slut, her name's Greta?*

She had bent her first three fingers and stuck out her pinky finger and thumb and brought her hand to the side of her face, miming a phone call, and said in her best bubbly Barbie bitch voice, *"Henry? Oh, Officer Bowers. You must be Henry's dad. This is Greta Keene, is he there? At school? Oh. I just thought with the out of school suspension-- He didn't tell you about that? Well, when you do get a hold of him, can you have him call me back? It's about the pregnancy test. I mean, it could be a false positive, but I don't think so. My dad has been selling*

these things for years and they're like ninety-six percent accurate or something. Okay, bye!" Bev started cracking up and Sandy, holding two fingers up, declared, *"Two birds,"* now only a middle finger was up, *"one fucking stone!"*

Oh, how much she wished she'd done it as a preemptive strike.

"I got a busted old clunker I'm fixing up," he almost whispered, still playing with her hair. "Once I get it running, I can take you to a dark, empty lot on the edge of town, and we can seal the deal in the back seat."

"What?" She snapped to look him in the eyes.

"Or a motel room, I guess. I could rent us one for a few hours. I know one with a no-questions-asked policy."

She bolted upright, knocking her chair over in the process, and forced his hand back to his side.

"I'm not that kind of girl."

"Oh, you want me to buy you dinner first?" he snarked. There was an aggressive edge in his voice that had Bev tensing up all over.

It was Henry's understanding that sex was power. The more influence you had, whether through charm or fear, the more people you could fuck and the less people could fuck you, in a physical and metaphorical sense. Patrick scared the shit out of people and touched any girl he wanted. He also, well, Henry didn't admit that to anyone, least of all himself. In his mind, Beverly had practically no right to refuse him. She was the lowest of the low. She wasn't ugly, not by a long shot, but she wasn't all that strong either. She was poor, she was a girl, and true or not, people said she was easy. The village bicycle, everyone gets a ride, and all the boys wanted to try. She ought to be thanking him, he thought. Nobody bothered the toughest guy's girl. It was an insult to his authority, and saying things about her was an insult to his character. Might as well say he couldn't fuck at all.

But he could. Well, that is to say, he did. He told everyone he lost

his v-card to a hooker who was so impressed with him as a first-timer that she didn't even charge him. That wasn't entirely true. There was a lady of the night involved, a nineteen-year-old girl named Cheryl, but Henry didn't seek her out. His father brought her home.

Henry tried telling him he was hungry, but his father merely pushed him back in his room, not even closing the door before going at it with Cheryl just outside it. He was slobbering drunk and she didn't sound like she was enjoying it at all. It went on for three hours in different parts of the house before he could make himself sleep. His father woke him up the next day with a kick to his empty stomach, harder than he meant to but not as hard as he could have, and tossed the keys to him, telling him to take the now near-catatonic girl home. So he did. She saw tears in his eyes the entire ride, and when they got there she pitied him too much to push him off when he climbed on top of her. She cradled his neck like she was supporting her baby's head instead of digging her nails into his back and didn't make any of the porno noises that he told everyone about. He cried the whole time, didn't last that long, and couldn't even finish. When he apologized for not having any money, she gave him an attempted smile and patted his cheek and stumbled out of the car and into her house. He was fourteen.

"Come on," he said, seeing she was trying to slink away. "You're fourteen?"

"Thirteen," she corrected. She would be fourteen in not too long, but she refused to legitimize any claim he was trying to make.

"They used to put girls your age on the street corner for two bucks an hour. I'm not asking you to do that. Just me." He cracked a hideous smirk and held her arms just above the elbows.

It was a bad look on him. Standing like that he looked like-- wait a minute.

Yes. It was true. She couldn't believe she had only now made the connection. Henry Bowers was just like her father. If you put them side by side to compare them, the only differences would be physical. Both were without pure love. Both used their hands only to hurt, harm, molest, harass, and corrupt. *And they both want to fuck*

me, she thought bitterly.

Before Sandy disappeared, she started telling Bev about what a crazy bastard Sigmund Freud was. She told her about all his wacky theories and concepts that didn't make any sense but she supposed that if one was looking for answers, they could twist it into making sense to them. She imagined him in a silver-white Elizabethan doublet with dark orange buttons and a massive fluffy ruff. He wore a crown of polished copper spoked with little phalluses and held a scepter carved to look like a nude woman. Beverly herself was there, dressed in a harlequin's parti-colored spandex and jingly hat. She was standing on one foot, juggling Jacosta's brooches and crown, and then some bloody daggers, singing something about supplanting the father.

Nope. She was nobody's fool, not even Freud's. *Not today, at least.*

"No," she told him, pushing him away. "The answer is no."

He scrunched up his face at that and looked like he was about to throw a hissy fit.

"What do you mean, no?"

"I mean no," she stated calmly, taking another drag and blowing the smoke in his face. "No. I'm not interested. You struck out. Take your sales pitch to another girl, and leave me the hell alone."

"So you'd rather keep getting fingered by your daddy?" he demanded.

Well, you'd rather keep getting fingered by Patrick Hockstetter > , she thought. She almost said it, but knew it was better to hold her tongue. Instead, she told him, "I don't need you, or the sad excuse for an orgasm you give the other girls. You're an idiot to think I do." She was about to take another drag, but noticed how close it was getting to the filter and flicked it into his face instead.

"Go fuck yourself, Henry Bowers."

She turned to the window, opening it to get back inside the apartment. She could still hear him breathing behind her and processing her thorough rejection of him. She felt that familiar

pressure of frustrated hands as he flipped her around and pulled her into him.

It wasn't a proper kiss, more that he was using all the strength in his body to push his mouth on hers. She tried pushing him away, but he didn't even seem to notice. Pain, sharp yet achy, came from her scalp where he had too tight a grip on her hair and she could feel the thumb of his other hand dig into the back of her neck. But that wasn't all she could feel. Henry was getting stiff.

Anger and indignation burned like a fuse inside her. It was instinct how all her force rushed to her knee as she snapped it up between his legs. She shoved him away and he staggered a few steps back, his entire body wincing in pain and his hands covering his groin. The look on his face was somewhere between "that fucking hurt" and "et tu, Brute?" Combined with the lipstick he smudged on himself from her mouth, a brick red matte Sandy had given her, he looked almost comical. But Beverly was in no mood to laugh.

"You try that shit again," she spat out venomously, "I'll call the fucking cops and you can make damn well sure that I will get your father involved. Do you hear me?"

He was still wincing as he made his way down the steps. He turned toward her and spoke in vengeful wheezes.

"You fucking tease! You little cun--"

The mug smashed into the railing where his hand flinched away faster than Beverly could realize she grabbed it. The sharp, chemical smell of smoked cigarettes and cold black coffee filled the air. She would have to clean it up, and give her daddy some excuse as to how it broke, but she wasn't overly concerned about that now. Her eyes were stone-cold and her tongue was just as ready to bite as her teeth.

"Go."

And he limped away as fast as he could, muttering curses to himself.

The next day, of course, he told everyone that Beverly had slept with him. The only detail he kept consistent was that it was in the park.

He told some that it was in the grass, some that it was against a tree, some that it was on a bench, on the bridge, on the hood of a car, as well as several other inconsistencies about how undressed they were, how loud she was, and if he was her first. Despite all of the contradicting descriptions Henry gave on the supposed single encounter, everyone believed him. At least, they told everyone they knew unquestioningly. Soon it was written on the wall of every girls' bathroom in the Derry High School.

Blue Sharpie, Greta's handwriting. It was the same that wrote "*Bev Marsh will blow you for a dime, fifteen cents for overtime*" earlier that school year. Greta and all her lackey friends spent months throwing dimes and nickles at her. She didn't bother to contradict any of their graffiti. Others would write replies saying no it really was true or draw arrows at her arguing and write "*obvs a slut*" or something similar. If she scribbled it out, they wrote it on her locker.

She had her own marker, and considered writing "*Greta Keene made sweet, passionate love to me and Sandy Spungen in her father's office*" along with the phone number to Mr. Keene's drugstore. She considered, but ultimately decided against it. Everyone knew about Sandy being a lesbian, but Beverly knew she had better taste than that and refused to insult her by suggesting otherwise.

Author's Note:

I hope you guys enjoyed that. I was playing with a few concepts, like the circumstances of Betty Ripsom's disappearance, but cut them out to keep it from getting too clunky. I recently finished the book and so wanted to be respectful to the tone of Stephen King's work while using it in the movie universe.

Also, Sandy is fine. She got kicked out by her parents, so she skipped town with her girlfriend. 27 years later, they're happily married and don't remember anything about Derry.